

The Oresteia of Aeschylus

Agamemnon

Translated in verse by Robin Bond (2014)
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Agamemnon

Dramatis Personae

Guard

Chorus of Elders

Clytemnestra

Herald

Agamemnon

Cassandra

Aegisthus

Guard

I pray to the gods for release from this drudgery,
this watch-keeping, measured in years, sprawled here
elbows bent, doglike, on top of Agamemnon's house.
I contemplate the congregation of the stars at night,
as they bring both winter cold and summer heat to men,
bright masters, constellations splendid in the sky,
as in their turns they wane and rise to dominance.
And now I watch for the beacon's flame, the fire's
gleam, bringing word from Troy, a message of
the city captured; for a woman's sanguine heart 10
will have it so, her counsel more a man's.
And when I keep this restless bed of mine,
all wet with dew, unblessed with watchful dreams,
- for fear stands guard in place of sleep and keeps
my lids from meeting in security - why then
I make up my mind to sing, or hum a tune,
and hope to manufacture so an antidote to my
insomnia, lamenting in tears the fate of this house,
administered now far less well than before.
I would good fortune now might bring release from toil 20
with the flare of the beacon fire alight in the night.
O welcome, light in the darkness of night,
vanguard of dawn and bright source of much dancing
in Argos, in joy at this turn of events...
Awake, awake!
My call will penetrate to Agamemnon's wife
so that roused from her bed in the house with all speed
she may raise the fair song of rejoicing to greet
this beacon, if, in fact, Troy has been taken at last,
as this signal blaze must clearly proclaim. 30
And I myself will dance the overture!
For I will take my cue from my master's luck,
the fall of the dice in this watch has favoured me so!
I pray for this, at least, that I might clasp the master's hand
I love in mine, when he returns to rule this house.
But hush, now, as to that - a cattle beast has walked across
my tongue. The house itself, if only it could speak,
would tell the tale most clearly. I only speak to those
who have ears that hear, to the deaf I am dumb.

Chorus

This is now the tenth year since the kings, 40
Menelaus and Lord Agamemnon,
Priam's great opposition,
firmly harnessed, ensceptred,
enthroned by Zeus, Atreus' sons,
did launch from this land

the thousand-strong
 Argive fleet, martial aid,
 war cries clanging loud from their heart,
 a sound as of eagles
 trackless in grief for their young 50
 ones lost, carried high in the thermal
 whirl by the stroke of their
 wings, nest empty below,
 wasted the lingering labour
 their young ones cost.
 Some god in his height,
 Pan, Zeus or Apollo, hearing the screams
 of their neighbours the birds, the shrill
 cries of grief,
 send out a slow vengeance of Furies.
 So it was lord Zeus, the god of hosts, 60
 guest-friends, sends out the Atreidae
 against Alexander, a woman the cause
 and much manned, setting up for the Greeks
 and the Trojans alike many battles to weary
 the limbs, knees thrust down in the dust,
 lances broken and snapped
 in the war's early rites. It is now where
 it is and will end where the end has been set.
 No man can ease the tension of the wrath of god
 by burning sacrifices, by offerings that need no fire, 70
 or by the shedding of tears.
 But we, ancient of flesh, honour lost,
 had no share in that rescue attempt,
 stayed behind
 supporting our strength,
 childlike, on these staves.
 The sap of youth that shoots in the chest
 is lost from the land and War
 assumes here an old man's guise,
 while age itself, leaf withered, stumbles 80
 its three-footed way, weak as a child,
 wanders dreamlike in the day.
 Tyndareus' child,
 Clytemnestra, queen, what news
 has brought you here? What messenger's report
 persuaded you to circulate
 your priests of sacrifice?
 The altars of the gods are ablaze with gifts,
 gifts for all the gods whose care our city is,
 of sky, of earth, 90
 native to this place and not

	from here and everywhere the glare shoots skyward, conjured up by the gentle, guileless persuasion of oils, oils costly and pure, from the innermost parts of this royal house. Tell of these things what is possible, lawful, consent to be a comforter to our perplexity, at once a source of foreboding and next of kindly hope, aglow from the flames of sacrifice, and sanity's unquenched defence, keeping at bay the pain that eats my heart.	100
[str. a.	Power I have yet to sing the success of their rule over men in their prime on the road; inspired I am still by the gods to persuade, and my age is well matched to the telling of tales. The might of the Argives, twin-throned, and the martial, like-minded array of the young men of Greece, was cast, vengeful spear in its hand, upon the land of Troy, and the senders, berserk, kings of birds, appeared to the kings of the ships, golden eagle, sea-eagle, in turn, close in on the side of the spear, clear to see on their nests, gorging, their feast gravid womb-fruit of hare, clawed at the last in the course of its flight. Sorrow, speak sorrow, but may what is well still prevail.	110
[ant. a	The valued Calchas, eyes prophetic of the host, observed the likeness to the warlike Atreids, at odds in style the two, said they, the generals, would 'rend the hare', foretold, "In time this force will stalk the town of Priam, Doom plunder, violate the public herds that browse beneath its battlements; but let no malice of the gods invest Troy's mighty curb, this force, with darkling cloud. For virgin Artemis for pity's sake is angry at the winged hounds the father sent to feast upon the trembling beast and hates the eagles' feast of pregnant dam and young." Sorrow, speak sorrow. but may what is well still prevail.	120
[mesod.	"Fair is the goddess, so kind in her heart to the birth-damp young of the lion, harsh beast and a source of delight to the breast-cherished cubs of all the wild things of the field, so she begs to accomplish the signs, the visible signs that I see bringing good, bringing ill in their train". I cry, 'Apollo, the Healer, do not let her bring on the Greeks a cessation	130 140

	<p>f ship-shifting breeze, to delay them too long, in her wish for an answering death, unsung, and not to be taken to eat, a match for that parent of strife, and she no respecter of men.</p>	150
	<p>'Dreadful there waits one to safeguard the house, a madness it is, avenging a child and mindful of guile." Even so Calchas trumpeted Fate to the men, great and good, the fate of the house from the flight of the birds on the way; yes, in concert with them, sorrow, speak sorrow, but may what is well still prevail.</p>	
[str.a.	<p>Zeus - whoever he is, and, if this title is pleasing to him, this is the name I bestow. Nothing I think of compares, of all things that I weigh, except Zeus, if I must successfully hurl from my mind its vain burden of dread.</p>	160
[ant.b.	<p>Not even he who formerly was great, teeming triumphant with strength, not even of him will the story survive; nor yet of the one who succeeded, now gone, though he won in his time. Yet the man who in earnestness trumpets victorious Zeus will not be astray at all in his mind, Zeus who has set men the route to good sense, set firm this sovereign rule, that wisdom is the child of pain. Displacing sleep before the heart there drips the constant memory of grief, and wisdom comes, like it or not, upon men.</p>	170
	<p>The kindness of the gods that sit at heaven's helm is savage indeed.</p>	
[ant.g.	<p>The elder leader of the Argive fleet did not blame the prophet then, but breathed in harmony with gusting fate, and the Argive host, aggrieved and hungry in the doldrum calm, hugged the shore of Aulis' beach, the currents flowing to and fro. The winds persisted from the North, imposing hunger, mischief, idleness, upon that tiresome anchorage; crews sauntered, careless of the ships and gear, the winds stretched time, ground down the withered bloom of Greece; the prophet then cried out</p>	180
		190

	another remedy, more biting than the bitter wind, a burden for the leading men, Artemis the cause the Atreids did beat on the ground with their staves, could not restrain a tear.	200
[ant. d.]	Lord Agamemnon spoke, the elder prince: "Grievous the doom should I disobey, but grievous, indeed, if I butcher the child, the delight of my house, and stain these father's hands with floods of virgin blood beside the altar place. What thing is free of disaster here? How can I desert the fleet, abandon my allies? To rage in anger for a sacrifice to ease the winds, a sacrifice of a virgin's blood, is right. I would it were well."	210
[str. e.]	But when he put on the harness of necessity, his heart's breath came evil within him, impure and unholy, changed so as to dare all in his hardihood. For madness encourages men in their schemes, wretched first cause of all ills. Emboldened he slaughtered his child for a war waged for one woman, a gift for the fleet.	220
[ant. e.]	Her prayers, her screams of 'father', her young and innocent life her judges discounted, lusting for war Her father, he prayed and instructed his crew, 'Though she clings at my robe, lift her high, like a young she goat, over the stone, face down, heart rending, cover her mouth, her fair lips, shutting off any curse she screams at my house.'	230
[str. f.]	Gagged in violence, muted the cry of her heart, saffron robes flowing down, she constantly pierced with the shaft of her piteous gaze each man that would kill her, speaking portrait of silent appeal, this girl who so often had sung midst these guests at her father's fair table, to honour with song and affection the third welcome drink	240

her dear father set out,
 clear voiced this virgin unploughed.
 [ant. f. I neither saw, nor can speak of what happened next,
 but Calchas's arts are not unfulfilled.
 The scales of Justice swoop down 250
 on those who will suffer and learn: you will
 hear what will be when it comes;
 leave it all well alone in advance.
 Foreknowledge is equal to pain.
 All will come clear with the sun's early light.
 May the business that follows upon these events turn out well,
 to match the desires of this woman close by,
 sole bulwark of Apia's land.

I have come respectful, Clytemnestra, of your strength;
 For Justice demands we pay respect to the chieftain's wife,
 should the man have left his throne untenanted. 260
 I would gladly learn if these sacrificial flames that have raised
 my hopes are in their turn inspired by news that is good
 or bad, although your silence would not cause offence.

Clytemnestra
 May dawn, the child of kindly mother night,
 be proven, as men say, a kindly messenger, and you
 will learn a greater joy than ever you hoped to hear.
 The Argive men have captured Priam's citadel.

Ch. How's that? Your word escaped my disbelief.
Cl. Troy is now in Achaean hands. Is that quite clear enough?
Ch. Joy steals upon me, summons a tear to my eyes. 270
Cl. Your eyes betray you for the loyal man you are.
Ch. But what convinced you? Have you proof of this?
Cl. Of course I have, unless some god has lied to me.
Ch. Is it in a vision and persuasive dream you put your faith?
Cl. I would not give tongue to fancies born of a sleeping soul.
Ch. Does some unspoken rumour nourish you?
Cl. Your words insult my mind, as if it were a child's.
Ch. How long is it, then, since the city was taken and sacked?
Cl. I speak of events of this kindly night that birthed this dawn.
Ch. What messenger could ever reach this place so rapidly? 280
Cl. Hephaestus' flame relayed his shining light from Ida's height.
 Each successive beacon's courier blaze sent on
 the message: Ida to the Hermaean Crag
 on Lemnos; Zeus' sacred heights of Athos third
 received that island's mighty torch,
 and then, like fish that in sheer joy do skim
 the sun's bright track across the sea, the flames,
 all golden, like the sun itself, announced
 their presence to the watchers of Makistos;

as they sleep the sound sleep of total success.
So long as they respect that city's gods, respect the temples
of the gods whose land they now possess, then they
who have despoiled might yet themselves escape 340
that fate; but let no lust to sack what they should not
beset their force, seduce it with desire for gain.
For still they need safe passage home, still need
to make completion of their race's homeward leg;
and if the army makes it home without offence to gods,
the curse of those that have been killed might be
aroused and still cause unexpected griefs to strike.
Such is the news you hear from me - a woman, yes;
let the good prevail and clearly be perceived as such.
Of many blessings this I most would choose to have. 350
My queen, you speak as soundly as might any careful man.
I am convinced of the truth of what you've said
to me and go to prepare my thankful prayers.
Out of ills has been wrought a worthy cause of gratitude.

O Zeus who is king and night who is kind,
endowed with mighty ornaments,
you cast above the towers of Troy
a net of constraint, so neither the old
nor young outleapt the ruinous all
encompassing mesh
and web of slavery.

Great the god Zeus that is Xenia's friend
and I praise the work he has done, on Paris
training his bow long ago that its shaft
might fall neither short, nor,
flying beyond, pass the stars.

Men can describe the bolt of Zeus,
an trace its very track.
Act followed the nod of his head. One man denied 370
the gods did think it worth their while
to trouble with men who'd trampled
rights inviolate; he was anathema.
A curse appeared to hound descendants born
of those that dared deeds beyond what was right,
and houses whose bloom exceeded the limit
of that which was best. Let grief absent
itself that a man might be content
who is gifted with sense. 380

at the altar of Zeus, inviting
total destruction.

[ant. a Designing persuasion enforces its prey,
infatuation's unstoppable child.
All remedy vain. Unconcealed
the mischief burns clear, horrid gleaming;
base bronze's true temper 390
is betrayed into blackness
by wear and tear justly tested; childlike
the man who chases the bird, elusive in flight,
he laid on his town an ineffable smear,
but none of the gods pays heed to his plea;
Zeus strikes down the man
of injustice enmeshed in these crimes.

Such a man also was Paris who came
to the house of Atreus' sons 400
and shamed his host by the theft of a wife.

[str. b.

She left the din of shields among her citizens,
lancers drilling by troops, marines
to man the men of war,
to take her dowry of destruction over the sea to Troy;
tripping lightly through
whose gates she had dared what she should not; the prophets of
the house did groan aloud and said,
"We grieve for the house, its champions,

410

grieve too for the bed, the print of their lust laid upon it!
In silence, dishonoured, her husband at home, no curses,
nor prayers for that lost to sight.
His longing for what has gone over the sea
will conjure a phantom to rule in the house."

The statues that mirror
her beauty, anathema now
to her man; Aphrodite has perished,
is dead in the void of his eyes.

[ant. b. Seductive, persuasive, illusory 420
visions appear, harbingers
of empty delight.
For all in vain is her seeming embrace,
elusive the vision,
twisting aside from his grasp, a dream
lost forever from sleep's winged path.
Such then the griefs in the house by the hearth,

but the griefs of the now are far worse.
 The host gathered from all over Greece
 suffers grief fit to harden the hearts 430
 of each individual house.
 Many losses there are to gnaw at the heart.
 Each wife knows the man that she sent
 on their way, but ashes and urns,
 in an exchange for men, is what is returned
 and comes home.

[str. c. Yes, Ares, who traffics in death and in corpses,
 who critically tilts the spear's balance in war,
 he sends from the pyre that is Troy 440
 burdens of dust, to be wetted with tears
 wrenched from their loved ones,
 crumbling to brim-full the urns,
 an easier cargo than warrior men.
 In their grief they praise
 one man as crafty in war, of another,
 he died well in the slaughter - for what?
 "For another man's wife!"
 each snarls in secret resentment
 born of pain creeping up 450
 on Atreus' litigant sons.

Some fine men keep their graves
 beneath the circuit of Troy's wall.
 Hostile the earth which they conquered and hold,
 concealing them now in its grasp.

[ant. c. The talk of the men of the town is grievous with rage;
 Fate drives payment of curses the citizens blend.
 I wait in my dread to hear 460
 what is hidden in night.
 The gods are not careless of those
 that have caused many deaths.
 Black Furies some day will plunge
 to the shades the man who is lucky
 beyond what is right, reversing
 the trend of his life; the shades
 of the dead can have no relief.
 Fair fame to excess is deadly
 indeed. For Zeus hurls his bolt
 with a flash of the eyes. 470

Ungrudged wealth I approve;
 I would not wish to sack a town,

nor face the life of a captive in war,
some other's slave and possession.

[epode

Swift the flame's progress
that brought the good news
to our town; who can know
if this is true, or some lie inspired by the gods.

Who is so childish or knocked so awry in his wits
that, inflamed in his heart by the
new words of the flame, he will suffer distress
if the story is changed?
It suits a woman's mind
to give thanks in the light of this flame.
Too credulous, a woman's mind is prone
to hasty judgements, and the rumours she
spawns speed swiftly into oblivion.

480

Cl.

We soon will learn the meaning of the message brought
by fire and by the relays and transmission of the flame,
and see if it is true or if the flame has come, dreamlike,
to seduce our hearts with empty hopes of false delight.
I can see a herald coming from the shore with olive sprigs
to shade his brows; his cloak of dust, parched sibling of
the mud, proclaims, so far as I can see, he comes
with news, no mere kindler of flames in the forest hills,
no maker of signals in smoke this man, he will speak out
and his words will all the more clearly bid us rejoice -
for I will not accept his purpose here is different from this.
May his appearance happily confirm the happy news.
May any man, who harbours wishes other than these
for our city, harvest for himself the fruit of foolishness.

490

500

Herald

All hail! I greet my native land, the soil of Argos!
In this the tenth year's dawn I have come home,
have gained one hope at least of many that are dashed.
For never did I dare to hope that I would die at home
in Argos, gain a share of this dear land for my grave.
So now I greet the earth and greet the sun's bright light,
greet Zeus, supreme in the land, and greet the Pythian lord,
Apollo, pray they loose their shafts at us no more.
For by Scamander's banks you were more than hostile enough,
but now, Apollo, lord, I pray you, be our saviour, heal
our wounds. I make my plea to all the gods who supervised
our sport and most of all to Hermes, my protector, well
loved herald who brings all heralds sacrosanctity,

510

to the heroes too that sent us on our way, receive in kindness
the remnant of the host that has survived the spear.

All hail the hall of kings, protecting roof I love,
the sacred council seats and statues of the gods that face the sun!
As never before, with eyes alight with joy and fitting dignity, 520
prepare to welcome the man, absent so long, your king!

Our lord Agamemnon has come to bring you a gift
of light in the darkness of night, a gift to share
with everyone. So welcome him as befits the man,
ploughshare of Zeus the dispenser of right,
who has levelled the city of Troy to the broken ground.
The altars and the temples of the gods are seen no more and all
the seeded increase of the land is rooted out, destroyed.

Our lord, the son of Atreus, that happy man, is home,
his yoke of servitude cast round the neck of Troy, 530
and he is most deserving of your praise of all mankind alive today.
For neither Paris nor his city will combine
to boast their crime was greater than the punishment.

Found guilty of the crimes of rape and theft,
he lost the prize he'd won and brought a harvest of
complete destruction on his native land and home.
The sons of Priam have repaid their crimes twofold.

Ch. Be welcome, herald of those who lead Argive host.
He. My greetings in return from one who now could die in peace.
Ch. Has longing for this, your native land, so tortured you? 540
He. So much that my eyes are filled with tears of joy.

Ch. This sickness which you have brings pleasure and distress.
He. Only when you school me in your meaning will I understand.
Ch. We too were struck with a need for those who also longed for us.

He. You mean this country matched us in our yearning to return?
Ch. How often from my heart's uncertainty a sigh was wrenched.
He. What caused your grief? Or did you feel anxiety for our force?

Ch. Long has my silence acted as a charm to ward disaster off.
He. Who was it made you tremble when the masters were away?
Ch. As you just said, to die in peace would be a blessing now. 550

He. It has turned out well in the end. In the fullness of time
a man may say in some respects our fortune prospered there,
but other things were not so good; then, who apart from gods
remains untouched by pain throughout their life's whole span?
For if I were to speak of what we suffered then, the harsh
conditions, the gangways cramped at sea, the verminous bunks
and, equal cause for loud complaint, privations endured by day ...
And on the dry land too ... horror there was and worse.
Our beds lay deep in the shade of the enemy walls
and the dew dripped down from the sky and the damp 560
rose too from the earth, bringing mildew to blankets

and a plague of lice, alive, infesting our hair.
 The winter that killed the birds with cold, should I speak
 of that? Of intolerable frosts the like of which
 Mt Ida brings? Or summer heat, when the sea slept still
 in a stifling, waveless calm in its bed, bereft of breeze?
 But why should I rehearse these ills? Our trials are done.
 Yes, done, - as are the trials of those now dead, who need
 no longer care to think of resurrection; but why
 should we survivors count the cost in deaths, 570
 or grieve at fortune's fickleness? I say that we
 should be well pleased, who are the remnant of
 the Argive force, for whom the balance
 of advantage more than holds its own with pain.
 and it is right for us, whose fame has taken wing
 across the land and sea, to glory in this day's dawn and boast
 how we, the Argive host, did capture Troy and have,
 in homes throughout the length and breadth of Greece,
 made trophies for the gods, an ancient source of pride.
 And those who hear such words as these must praise 580
 our city and our generals; for so will the glory of Zeus
 have respect in accomplishing this. Such then is my tale.
 Ch. I am not displeased to be convinced by what you say.
 For even aged men are not too stale to learn a lesson well.
 But most of all it is right that Clytemnestra and her house
 should mark this news which so enriches me with them.
 Cl. I cried aloud in joy and triumph long ago when first
 the message of the night borne flame arrived,
 announcing Troy was captured and destroyed.
 Some men did mock me then and said, "Can you believe, 590
 and be persuaded by these watch fires of the sack of Troy?
 A woman's heart is all too ready to be uplifted so."
 According to such talk it seemed that I had lost my mind.
 Still I made sacrifice, and in a womanlike way
 did different voices tongue throughout the town,
 as men rejoiced among the temples of the gods
 and poured the wine to still the scented sacrificial flames.
 So why then should you now detail for me the total tale,
 when I will learn it all from Agamemnon's lordly mouth?
 It is best that I make haste to welcome him, when he 600
 comes home again, my honoured lord, - for what
 is a sweeter sight for a wife to see than this,
 the gates agape to greet her husband home from war,
 kept safe by the gods? You, tell my husband this:
 to come as swiftly as he can - this man the city loves!
 He will find his faithful wife inside when he returns,
 just as he left her, guarding his stately home,
 a trusted watchdog, loyal to him, a bane to his foes,

and in everything else unchanged, the seal set on
her chastity unsullied still in all that length of time. 610
No other man has pleased me, my reputation is
as sound and pure as unadulterated bronze.
A woman, nobly born, need feel no shame to utter
such a boast as this with its pregnant burden of truth.
Ch. The queen has spoken and her words are clear to read
for those with ears to sense the proper meaning there.
Now, Herald, speak, that I might learn of Menelaus,
if he has returned safe home in company with you,
the man who is the well-loved bulwark of this land.
He. It cannot be that I should mask bad news with lies 620
to gratify indefinitely the ones who hold him dear.
Ch. Is it so hard for you to tell a truth to us to bring us joy?
Unpalatable truths are not so easily concealed.
He. The man was lost to sight from the Argive fleet,
both the man and his ship. This is the truth I have to tell.
Ch. Was he lost to your sight as he sailed from Troy, or did
some shared disaster, a storm perhaps, snatch him away?
He. Like a top notch bowman you have hit the mark
and have cut short a story long on grief.
Ch. Have you had any word from any of those that sail 630
the seas if he is still alive or of his death?
He. Of that no one has any certain knowledge save the sun
whose warmth gives increase to the living earth.
Ch. And how do you say this storm assailed the fleet?
Was it the anger of the gods? How did it end?
He. It is not right to spoil a day of such fair fame by giving tongue
to messages of gloom. Respect for the gods lies other where.
Whenever a herald, with downcast face, brings news
of the army's wretched butcher's bill to town,
and says that the people at large has suffered one wound, 640
also that many individuals, men driven from home
by the twin barbed goad, beloved of Ares, god of war,
have met their fate, conjoined in blood, on the point of a spear...
Well, loaded with sorrows like that, the herald
should rather sing his victory song to give
the Furies praise, but, as I come with welcome news
of our salvation to gladden the city's heart...
how shall I then commingle happy news with sad,
reporting the storm which was sent against us by the angry gods?
For they, the deadliest of enemies in former days, 650
conspired, yes, fire and sea, and took a solemn oath
to rain destruction on our wretched Argive fleet.
The stormy swell of the sea rose deadly in the night.
The northern winds from Thrace thrust ship
on ship. In the storm's force, blindly rammed,

they were scattered and lost to mutual sight
 in the gusting rain, a circling mob, the shepherd inept.
 And when the sun's bright orb did finally arise
 we saw a flowering of corpses on the sea, a bloom
 of Argive warriors and fragments of wreck. 660
 As for us and our ship, some god, no man, purloined
 us, his hand on the helm, and gained our acquittal all unscathed.
 Good fortune attended our ship and willed it safe,
 so that she neither took on board green water on the deep,
 nor beached herself to break apart upon some rocky shore.
 And when we had escaped a watery grave, in the day's
 pale light, not yet believing in our luck,
 we mustered our wits to face this new calamity,
 the sight of our army cruelly pounded, quite spent. 670
 And now, if any of them are still alive, they'll say,
 of course, that we have all been killed - what else? -
 while we must entertain the same suspicions of their fate.
 I hope that all will turn out for the best, but yet
 must fear, indeed expect, that Menelaus is no more.
 However, if the sun's bright rays still find him out,
 alive and well, then there is hope that he
 will make it home again, if Zeus is not inclined
 to bring about the total decimation of this race.
 Hear this and know you listen to the truth. 680

Ch. Who was it coined this fatal name
 [str.a. in all respects most accurate? -
 it must have been a man possessed
 of a tongue
 itself possessed of future sight
 of what is bound to come.
 Spear-bride and source of strife,
 yes, Helen, bringing hell and death
 alike to men and cities, from
 her bed of luxury she sailed 690
 on Zephyrus' breath,
 titanic; in the vanishing wake
 of her oars
 a host of shield-bearing men,
 a pack in pursuit, their quarry gone
 to ground in the reed covered banks
 of Simois, intent
 on blood and strife.

[ant.a. A shackle of wedded woe,
 well named and working its will, 700
 in the fullness of time

their rage imposed on Ilium, for guest
friendship and Zeus, domestic deity,
scorned, punishment exacted for
that boisterous song,
hymenaeal, which fate
then demanded
the new kin sing.

A new song is sung,
full of grief, by Priam's Troy,
too old now to learn,
cursing the bedstainer, Paris his name,
destructive and grievous, a bane
on the life of a town
enduring the grief
of citizen blood.

710

[ant. b. A man once reared in his home
a lion cub, unweaned and still
fond of the teat;
in its formative years,
gentle, soft, loving the children, charming
the old folk often it lay in the crook
of their arms like a child, newly born,
eyes bright as it fawned on their hand,
compelled by the ache of its belly for food.

720

[ant. b Maturity betrayed its natural bent,
inherited not learned, repaid
the kindness of its foster kin
with wasteful slaughter of sheep,
creating, unbidden, a feast for itself,
and the house was sullied with blood,
a great pain unconnected with war
afflicted the people, a murderous bane
sent from the god, a minister of death
had been raised against the house.

730

[str. c. Let me describe her first coming to Troy,
of her demeanour so calm
and unruffled,
a delicate emblem of richness, submission
the glance of her eyes, love's
bloom to eat out your soul.
Perverted the course of that marriage to a bitter end,
a curse of ill luck on the house
hurled down on Priam's kin

740

by hospitable Zeus,
a Fury to make the bride weep.

[ant. c. There is an ancient maxim, long standing it has 750
among men: a man's wealth full grown
perpetuates itself,
gives birth and does not die without increase,
an insatiable offspring of grief
for the race is the fruit of good luck.
My thought runs otherwise:
It is the evil act gives birth
to further deeds that match its sire;
always blessed is the house 760
where right and justice give birth
to sons that are fair.

[str. d. Among the evil generations of
men born to die, Pride is likely
begotten by Pride soon or late
and, when the due day of its birthing arrives,
the Daimon emerges, undiverted by war
or by strife, an unholy bane of black
Ruin and madness at large in the halls, with the stamp 770
of their parents upon it.

[ant. d. But Justice shines bright in the smoke
stained halls of the house and she honours
the life of the god-fearing man.
The gold spangled booty of hands fouled with crime
she abandons, reproachful her eyes,
keeps company with piety, pays no respect
to power in wealth that bears the stamp of false praise; 780
she directs all to its appointed end.

We welcome the king, the sacker of Troy's tall citadel!
All hail to the noble son of Atreus!
But how to address you? How give honour due
and not exceed nor give short measure of praise
to this time of delight?
For many are they among men that honour the semblance
of honour, but transgress against Justice themselves.
Each and every man is ready to join and grieve with a man 790
who has suffered defeat, but the sting of their grief
comes nowhere near the seat of the pain;
And likewise men will join in rejoicing and force
their faces to take on lines of artificial delight...
But any man who is skilled in judging his flock,

their seeming joyous eyes will not escape his note,
 fawning in friendship dilute.
 At the time that you sent off the army to Troy
 and all for Helen's sake - I shall not hide my thought - 800
 you were painted in my heart in unbecoming tones,
 misguided, I thought, the course of your mind,
 providing courage born
 of the sacrifice to men on the point of despair.
 But now my true friend's heart and mind
 are well disposed to those whose task is well done.
 In time you will learn, when enquiry you make,
 just who of the townsfolk have served the city
 with justice and who have not.

Agamemnon

Right first demands I greet the land of Argos 810
 and its native gods that share with me in my
 return and shared alike in meting justice out
 to Priam's town. For the gods, persuaded by
 our deeds, not words, cast votes without dissent
 into the urn of blood and death to wreak destruction on
 the town of Troy. Vain hope was all there was
 that a hand might hover above the other urn - and so
 that fortunate city is overtaken now by smoke,
 the cyclones of ruin still blow, and thick billows
 the breath from the guttering embers of wealth. 820
 One must give many mindful thanks to the gods
 for these gifts, since we have taken plunder fit
 to boast of, and for one woman's sake
 the Argive beast, the wooden horse, has trampled
 a city to dust, given birth to a host of shields,
 has measured its predator's leap on a backdrop of stars,
 and the cannibal lion plunged over the lofty wall
 of Troy to lap up its fill of a tyrant's blood.
 I have extended my thanks to the gods; let them
 serve but as prelude. I hear and heed your thoughts, 830
 agree with them - in me you find a like-minded man.
 Few men there are whose nature allows them
 to honour a fortunate friend ungrudgingly.
 The venom of ill will sitting close to the heart
 compounds the discomfort for envy's sick victim.
 The man himself is tortured by his own disease
 and also grieves at the sight of another's success.
 I speak as one who has experience. I know too well
 the dubious and shadowed image of life's face,
 and the men who seem to be, - oh, so devoted to the king. 840
 Odysseus, who had to be compelled to sail, alone

was ready, once conscripted, to bear the yoke with me -
 but whether I name a man who is dead, or still
 alive... As for the rest of our affairs, both secular
 and divine, we will assemble together full council of
 our folk and take advice to guarantee that our
 good health and luck remain set fair long term,
 but if there is, in fact, a need for healing remedies,
 then we, sound-thinking men, will aim by cautery
 or by the knife to put this bane of plague to flight. 850
 Now I will go in to my palace and domestic hearth
 to greet initially, with all familiarity, the gods who sent
 me far away and have brought me home once more.
 Since victory has followed me, so let it always stay with me.
 Cl. As citizens and men of Argos you gentlemen deserve
 respect, and yet I feel no shame to speak to you the love
 I bear my man; in time the sense of what is proper fades
 and withers in humankind. This is no second hand tale
 that I tell, but the course of my own sad life's history
 for the time this man spent beneath the walls of Troy. 860
 For a woman to sit in her house, divorced from her man,
 is firstly a desolate and extraordinarily evil thing,
 perpetually prey to outbreaks of rumours and gloom.
 Now one would come, and now another with news
 far worse than the one before, crying disaster on the house.
 And if this man had had as many wounds as the word
 that flooded this house maintained, he would
 have had more holes to count than any fishing net.
 If he had died as many times as swelling rumour told, he must
 have owned three bodies, been a second Geryon, to boast 870
 a heavy threefold coverlet of earth above for burial - not to
 mention that below - and boast the need to die three times,
 each manifestation demanding a separate end.
 Because of recurrent rumours such as these,
 there were nooses, slung aloft, and round my neck,
 which other hands did grasp and loosen forcibly.
 This is the reason why your son, Orestes, does not stand
 beside me as he ought, the one who is pledge of our ties
 of mutual affection. Do not be surprised at this.
 Our friend and ally, Strophius of Phocis, kindly cares 880
 for him; for he foretold a double dose of risk
 to me, the peril hanging over you beneath the walls
 of Troy, then insurrection by the people here and anarchy
 confounding government, since it is the nature of
 our mortal kind to put the boot into a man when he is down.
 This is my explanation and it contains no subterfuge.
 The springing torrent of my lamentation's flood
 runs dry and there is not one teardrop left inside to weep.

	My eyes felt the pain of lack of sleep, as I wept with frustration at the unattended lights - and still never news of you from the beacon sites. And in my dreams I was wrenched out of sleep by the thin wing beat of a whining gnat, as I saw you take more hurts than even the time that I slept with could contain. All this have I endured and now, my heart released from grief, let me greet this man, this watchdog of our flock, the ship's sustaining figurehead, the high roof's central prop, fixed firm in the earth, a sire's sole son and heir, a sailors' glimpse of land, hope gone, day's dawning from the storm, fairest far to look upon, parched traveller's draught from the flowing spring. How sweet it is to escape from all necessity! Such are the words I choose to honour him. Let envy keep its distance. For I have suffered many ills in time gone by. But now, my love, step down from off your chariot, but do not set down your foot upon the ground, my lord, who laid in waste the town of Troy. Slaves, why delay in your appointed tasks? Bestrew the ground where he will walk with tapestries. And let there be a path of purple laid into this house he had not hoped to see, a path as Justice might approve. As for the rest, my mind alert, not overcome with sleep, will all dispose, a disposition just and set with help divine.	890
Ag.	Offspring of Leda, guardian of my house, in one respect at least your words of welcome match my absence - both were overlong. And as for praise that is appropriate, that gift must come from other mouths than yours. Also, seek not to pamper me, as if I were a woman, nor, prostrate, mouth your flattery as at some foreign potentate and do not, pray, with tapestries thrown down provide a path to nemesis for me; it is right and proper to honour the gods in such a way, but no mortal man can trample down embroideries so gorgeous as these without a pang of dread. I say to honour me as suits a man and not a god. Renown declares itself without the need to wipe its feet on tapestry, while modesty of mind is the gods' most precious gift. No life should be described as happy unless brought to a prosperous close. The future holds no fears for me, if thus I organise my life.	900
Cl.	Well tell me this, and do not fail to speak your mind...	
Ag.	Know well that I shall speak my uncorrupted mind!	
Cl.	In a moment of fear did you vow this course to the gods?	
Ag.	I spoke with as full awareness as any of my words' intent.	
Cl.	What think you Priam would have done, if he had won?	910
		920
		930

[illegible]

to prophecy, and why no confidence
in my dear heart to spurn
false prophecies
as doubtful dreams?
For the time is long gone
when the hawsers were cast off
in the turbid and turbulent surf
and the army took ship,
set sail for Troy.

[ant. a. I see at first hand and
believe in their safe return,
but yet my heart inside me sings, 990
self-schooled,
a joyless, tuneless song, a Fury's song
of vengeance, quite
hopeless my heart, unconfident.
Gut feelings will not be ignored.
My heart and soul, a vortex,
wrenched by thoughts of justice
brought to pass.
I pray my dreads
are vain, do not fall out
and come to pass. 1000

[str. b. A man cannot have
an excess of health.
For illness, health's
close neighbour, ever crowds
the man, whose destiny runs straight,
and runs him aground on an unseen reef.
The sacrifice of part for whole
is caution's choice, to jettison the surplus,
nicely weighed - the house in its entirety
is not then capsized, because it is
too fully loaded, past capacity -
nor is a ship submerged.
The plentiful bounty of Zeus is generous.
The furrowed harvest brings an end
to famine's plague.

[ant. b. The mortal blood
that falls
in blackness
on the ground
before the victim's feet, 1020
what spells can call it back to life?

One man was skilled in bringing back
the dead, Asclepius by name.
Zeus thwarted him and it cost him dear.
Had not the gods a balance set,
so none could step beyond their role,
my heart, anticipating now the office of
the tongue, would vent these thoughts.
But mumbling in the dark, 1030
heartsore, it is bereft of any hope
of ever winding up to any proper end,
and my mind burns.

Cl. Bring yourself also within, yes you, Cassandra;
for Zeus has in his kindness granted you a share
in the worship in this house, to stand with all
the many other slaves beside the family shrine -
come down from the chariot, do not be proud.
For men do say that Herakles himself was bought 1040
and sold and forced to eat the bread of slavery.
If fate and fortune have it that you have to be a slave,
be very grateful that your masters have ancestral wealth.

Those new come to unexpected wealth will treat
their slaves with unprecedented cruelty in everything.
From us you will have the treatment custom requires.
Ch. Her speech just made was clear, and intended for you.
You are a captive, part of the fated spoils of Troy -
you should obey her, if you can; would you refuse?

Cl. Unless her speech is like the swallow's song, and she 1050
is possessed of unknown tongue, barbarian,
then she must take note and obey the words I speak.

Ch. Come. What she says is best, the way things are.
Obey and leave the chariot seat behind.

Cl. I do not have the leisure time to waste outside
the house; the victim for the sacrifice already stands
beside the central hearth and is readied for death.
An unprecedented pleasure awaits me now.
If you are going to do what I say, then waste no time,
but if, in ignorance, you cannot take my gist, 1060
why - flap your foreign hand and do not speak!

Ch. This stranger seems to stand in need of an interpreter.
She is like some newly netted creature of the wild.

Cl. No, rather she is crazed and heeds her own sick thoughts;
for she has left behind her newly netted town
to come here, has not learned to bear the curb
before her rage is spent in bloodied foam.
I will not be dishonoured more by wasting words on her.

Ch. I pity her myself and am not moved to anger.
Come now, poor wretch, and leave the chariot, 1070
give way and accept this new yoke of necessity.

Cassandra

Aghhhhhhhhh! Agh!
[str. a. Apollo! Apollo!
Ch. Why in anguish raise your voice to Loxias?
For he is not the kind of god to welcome grief.

Ca. Aghhhhhhhhh! Agh!
[ant. a. Apollo! Apollo!
Ch. Once more she calls on the god, tongue-tied in grief,
but before this god it is not right to stand and weep.

Ca. Apollo! Apollo!
[str. b. Public guardian, Apollo mine! 1081
A second time in fickleness you have destroyed me.
Ch. She seems about to sing of her own distress.
The gift divine of prophecy lives on within her heart.

Ca. Apollo! Apollo!
[ant. b. Public guardian, Apollo mine!
Where have you brought me now and to which house?
Ch. The house of Atreus' sons. Let me inform
your ignorance. In speaking this you speak the truth.

Ca. God hated then and conscience cursed,
[str. c. a house of kindred deaths and hideous strength, 1091
of a warrior's butchery upon the bloodied killing floor.
Ch. Keen-scented, like some hunting bitch, the stranger seems
to hound the places where a murder might be found.

Ca. Yes, these are witnesses here to my belief;
[ant. c. these children crying out at butchery,
their own flesh baked for a father to feast upon.
Ch. We have had word of your prophetic fame before,
but we have no need of prophets here.

Ca. Ah! What is she plotting now?
[str. d. What is this huge new pain? 1101
Some huge new crime is being plotted in this very house,
to injure loved ones dreadfully, incurably,
and any remedy is far away.
Ch. I have no understanding of these fresh prophecies.
The rest I know too well. The entire city shrieks with it.

Ca. [ant. d.]	Ah, woman, shall you bring this thing to pass? To wash and bathe your bedmate, husband, make him clean and bright - I ask, for what? Yes, this will swiftly be. A hand outstretched to grasp the hand outstretched...	1110
Ch.	I do not understand, am at a total loss, confronted by these riddles and the purblind ravings of the god.	
Ca. [str. e.]	Noooo! Nooo! Ah! What vision is this? She is the hunting net of Death! His wife herself the snare, she shares the guilt of blood. Let strife insatiable within this line give tongue at the ritual stony death.	
Ch.	What kind of Fury is this in the house you call upon to rouse itself? Your words do not enlighten me. Dark runs the flow of purple blood towards my heart, congeals, as it does in the darkling dusk of lives that have succumbed to the spear. Destruction is swift and imminent.	1120
Ca. [ant. e.]	Ah! Ah! See! See! Keep the bull from the cow! She snares him in his robes and gores with a horn of blackness and guile. He stumbles and falls in the bath.	
Ch.	I tell you of fate brought to pass in a bath. I would not boast that I can read the oracles of gods with clarity, but still I hazard these pronouncements bode no good. What benefit has ever come to men from oracles? For only out of disaster do the garrulous skills of the seer bring messages of dread for men to learn.	1130
Ca. [str. f.]	Evil the fate that rules my wretched destiny; With welling tears I grieve at my suffering. What is it that you have brought me to in my pain? For nothing else, but to share in another's death - of course.	
Ch.	Your mind is unhinged by the transports of god, lamenting a death, your own, a song unmeasured, a song the tawny nightingale might warble tirelessly, heartsore for its dear one, "Itys, Itys!" - grieving a life that is fruitful of woe.	1140
Ca.	Ah yes, the fate of the warbling nightingale...	

[ant. f.	The gods cloaked her body in feathers and down, granted her pleasant life with no reason for tears; For me awaits impalement on the double sided blade.	
Ch.	Is some god the source of this anguish that wantonly batters your soul? This is a song of dread you strike up and proclaim in a cry, the cry of a beast, inarticulate, shrill. What limit is set to your ill omened path of prophecy?	1150
Ca. [str.g.	I grieve at the match Paris made, at the deaths that it brought to his friends, for the river, Scamander, that watered the land of my father, the waters beside which I too then flourished and grew. Soon now it seems I shall sing, inspired, of Cocytus and of the tortures found beside the banks of Acheron.	1160
Ch.	The words you speak are now too clear! A child could understand. Again I am struck to the heart by the goad, all blood, of a fate as bitter as yours, and you sing a song that is painful to hear.	
Ca. [ant. g.	I grieve for the pains, the pains of the town, completely destroyed, for sacrifices father made in front of his walls, for the prodigal slaughter of grazing flocks. No cure at all they brought to save the city from the suffering it had feel; and I shall presently spill my body's warmth upon the ground.	1170
Ch.	This follows the run of your former song. Some god with ill intent weighs hard upon you, inspiring you to force expression of a song, a song replete with grievous pain and death. I cannot tell the end of it.	
Ca.	My prophecy will no longer peek in diffidence from out its wrappings like some new and blushing bride; like a wind blowing clear to the east, it will come, I think, a grief much greater than mine, that will come like the swell of a wave that lifts to the light of the dawn. I shall teach no longer by riddles. And you too bear me witness, hunting by my side, as I scent the traces of these crimes of long ago. A choir there is that gives tongue in unison, an ugly sound, and it shall not ever leave this house. Its message is grim. Intoxicated by the blood of men and so whipped up	1180

	the more, it leads the lasting revelry of Furies in the house, the spirits of murdered kin so hard to dislodge.	1190
	Besieging the house, they sing their song of its ruin and original crime, spitting despite in their rage on the man who despoiled his brother's bridal bed. Did I miss the mark, or did I play the marksman properly? Am I false prophet, babbling at the doors I knock upon? On oath bear witness that I know about the crimes that are the long time story of this house.	
Ch.	What benefit would accrue from such a binding oath, in all honesty sworn? But still I am amazed that you, though reared across the sea yet have the power to speak the truth about another's town, as if you had been there.	1200
Ca.	Apollo, lord of prophecy, has set this task for me.	
Ch.	I assume that, god though he was, he lusted after you?	
Ca.	In former times I was ashamed to talk of these things.	
Ch.	In good times one can afford a certain delicacy.	
Ca.	He locked my limbs in combat, breathed delight.	
Ch.	Did you come to the business then of.. procreation?	
Ca.	I promised that I would, but broke my word to Loxias.	
Ch.	And now you are a captive of the arts of prophecy?	
Ca.	I prophesied before the sum total of my city's grief.	1210
Ch.	How come you escaped Apollo's rage unscathed?	
Ca.	Ever since I let him down, nobody trusts a word I say.	
Ch.	And yet we think your prophecies are credible enough.	
Ca.	Ah! Ah! The evil, the grief and the woe! Once more the dreadful pain of truthful prophecy confounds my soul with dizziness at what is still to come... Do you see, seated there upon the house, young ones, nightmare shapes, images of dreams, children, dead at the hands of those nearest and dear to them, hands filled with the meat of their own flesh as food, soft offal and entrails, grasping, together displayed, a pitiful burden, the feast that their father enjoyed. In requital, I say, some creature is plotting revenge, a fawning lion that keeps to the house and rolls in the bed of the master who is on his way home, my master - for I must bear the yoke of slavery... The leader of ships and the sacker of Troy, he does not understand the nature of that tongue of the bitch that loathes him, yet did fawn on him at cheerful and ingratiating length to work an evil fate of hidden death.	1220
	Such boldness - for the wife to be a husband's murderer! I might give her any loathsome monster's name and still be accurate...reptilian she is, twin-headed, or some Scylla of the crags who is the bane of those that sail the sea, this avenging mother, born of Hell, breathing war	1230

and death implacable upon her kin! Oh, how this harridan's heart yelped triumphantly, as if berserk in the throes of war, while she simulated gladness at his safe return. And if I don't persuade you of the likelihood of this, why then what will come will come and you will soon stand by in pity to call me by the name of too true prophetess. 1240

Ch. I recognise and shudder at the feast of childish flesh Thyestes had, and dread possesses me to hear you tell this tale so truly, with no hint of fabrication. The rest I heard, but lost the scent and run confused.

Ca. I say you will bear witness to Agamemnon's death.

Ch. Peace, woman, hush! No words that bode so ill!

Ca. This story will allow no peace of mind.

Ch. No, not if it is willed, but I pray it may not come to that.

Ca. Yes, make your prayers, but others have murder in mind. 1250

Ch. By what man's hand is this monstrosity prepared?

Ca. Your reading of my messages is very far astray.

Ch. I do not know the man whose aim this is.

Ca. And yet my knowledge of your tongue is all too sure.

Ch. Apollo's oracles are framed in Greek, but yet are hard to read.

Ca. The pain that assails me burns like fire!

Ah, Lord Apollo, Wolf God, the pain, the pain!

The lioness herself, two footed, lies in congress with the wolf in the absence of the noble leader of the pride, and she will kill me wretchedly, infuse her rage 1260 with drugs compounded of her jealousy to pay me back, to hone her anger's knife for a husband's corpse, exact also my death in payment for my journey here. Why wear these things that make a mock of me? And why the sceptre, and the seer's garland round my neck? I will destroy you in anticipation of my fate. Go, go! Accursed! Hurl'd down in payment for my pain! Enrich some other victim with disaster now instead of me! Behold, Apollo himself divests me of my robes of prophecy, Apollo who has watched me mocked 1270 by friends and enemies alike, decked out in all this finery, my prophecies ignored or doubted. I learned abuse, as if I were some rabid charlatan, some wretched filthy beggar - and endured it; And now the lord of prophecy himself has brought my task of prophecy to its appointed fatal end. The butcher's block and not a father's altar waits for me, ensanguined with warm blood, all ready for my sacrifice, but in our death we will not be neglected by the gods. For another will come in his turn to avenge us, 1280 a son to kill a mother and avenge a father's death. An exile and a wanderer, sent by his kin from out this land,

	he will return, the final architect of their destruction. For the gods have sworn a solemn, mighty oath that from the grave his father's tumbled corpse will summon him. Yet why should I thus raise my voice in pity and in tears? For first of all I saw my city, Ilium, and how she met her fate, and I have seen the city's captors how they fare, according to the dictates of the gods. And I will go to meet my fate. I will endure to die.	1290
	This gateway where I speak is an entrance to Hell. I pray the blow that I receive is skilfully struck that I might die with dignity, and close my eyes with no convulsive flux and gout of blood.	
Ch.	You have suffered much and so become wise, and much have you said, but if, in fact, you have sure knowledge of your very own share in death, how can you make your way in calmness to the altar like some sacrificial cattle beast?	
Ca.	There is no escape, none, strangers, not in the time that is left.	
Ch.	But one's last portion of time on this earth is most valued!	1300
Ca.	The day has come. I find no profit in flight.	
Ch.	Know you are brave, inspired by an indomitable heart.	
Ca.	No one that is happy ever hears such words of praise.	
Ch.	To die, though, but die well is a source of grace to us.	
Ca.	I grieve for you, father, and your children nobly born.	
Ch.	What is this thing that turns you from your path in dread?	
Ca.	The horror, the horror!	
Ch.	What is it that you flee? Some new abomination of the mind?	
Ca.	The walls of the house breath death and bloody murder.	
Ch.	It cannot be! This is the smoke and stench of sacrifice.	
Ca.	As such it suits the smoke that comes from the grave.	1310
Ch.	The sacrifice was never some exotic decoration for the house.	
Ca.	But I will go inside the house and there lament my fate and that of Agamemnon. Let this be the limit of my life. Ah, friends! I do not keen in fear, like some bird at the snares in a bush, and all to no avail; bear witness later to my dying words, when a woman pays for my woman's life with her own and a man who made an evil match will die to pay her man. On the point of death I beg this stranger's gift from you.	1320
Ch.	I pity you in the wretchedness of your prophetic fate.	
Ca.	I wish to give tongue just one more time, to a dirge lamenting me. I pray to this, last light of the sun that I shall see, that those who avenge my master's death will also exact requital in blood for me, poor dead slave that I am, and an object that is easily crushed. The lot of humankind is pitiful. The good fortune a man enjoys is a sketchy thing at best, and if one's fortunes change,	

a wet sponge erases them with but a single pass.
That is far and away the thing I find most pitiable of all. 1330

Ch. Among mankind it is nature's way that the taste
for success can never be sated; no man cries a halt
to it, to keep it from his envied palaces
with this injunction, "You are welcome no more!"
The blessed gods did grant this man the gift
of taking Priam's Troy;
he comes back home with honour gained from god;
if he must now pay for former blood himself,
by death, and by his death ordain the punishment
and death of others too, 1340
what man, on hearing this, could boast he was
himself born free of enmity divine.

Agamemnon

Ch. Agh! I am struck to the heart a fatal blow!
Ag. Be still! Who cries and complains of a fatal wound?
Ch. Agh! Again, and worse! A second blow!
The deed, it seems, is done; for these are the cries of our king!
We must join and decide, if we can, on a plan that is safe.

1. Then let me tell you what it is I think is right:
proclaim to the people to come here to the house!
2. I say rather as fast as we can we should make an assault, 1350
convict them, the blood still fresh on their swords.
3. Such too is my plan, I agree, and that is the course
of action I vote. Delay will do no good!
4. It is clear to see that these are the first steps and signs
of those who harbour tyrannical intent against the town.
5. We are wasting time, while they spurn caution's fame,
do not lapse into sleep, when once the job's in hand.
6. I do not know what course I suggest we take.
For the man of action also needs a plan.
7. And I agree with you. I know no way by means 1360
of words that we will serve to resurrect the dead.
8. And shall we then drag out our lives in shame, subject
our homes to the tyranny of leaders such as these?
9. It is intolerable, a fate that is worse than death.
Yes, death is a fate far sweeter than tyranny.
10. But can we be sure from the proof of the cries
that we heard that our master is certainly dead?
11. We ought to have clear proof before we vent
our anger. Guesswork and proof are poles apart.
12. The weight of numbers convinces on all sides 1370
that I should learn precisely how it is with Atreus' son.

Clytemnestra

I said much in the past that was governed by expediency,
but now I feel no shame to change my tune and speak the truth.
How else could I have raised the net of death too high
to overleap, when I was fighting hate with hate, embroiled
with those seeming friends that were in fact my enemies?
This contest has been long and well thought through by me.
The long held grudge is satisfied in the fullness of time.
I stand, where I killed him, at the scene of the crime.
I did what I did - and I shall not attempt to deny it - 1380
that he might not escape, nor yet ward off his fate.

I cast a complex net for him, as for a fish,
an evil weave it was of wealthy cloth,
and struck him twice; two groans was all,
his limbs collapsed: and where he lay prostrate
I gifted him another cut, a third, and made of him
a welcome offering to Hades' house, sure keeper of the dead.
So he fell and coughed out his last breath, and sudden
the gush of carnage from his mouth to soak
me, pure and dark, moist rain of his death, 1390
and I laughed with delight to match the sharp
and burgeoning joy fields find in the god-given rain.

Rejoice that the thing is done, my ancient lords
of Argos, if rejoice you will, while I rain curses down!
Were it right to pour an offering above the corpse, then such
a gift of imprecations would be just and more than just.
So great a goblet of distress this fellow filled for us inside
this house, which he has now returned to lift and drain.

Ch. We are dumbfounded at the boldness of your tongue,
when you make such a boast about your husband's death. 1400

Cl. You question me as if I were some empty headed girl.
Yet, as I speak to you, my breast is not aflutter, even though
you know what I have done - and your praise or blame is all
alike to me; this here is Agamemnon, husband mine,
and now he is a corpse by virtue of my own right hand,
a job well done and craftsmanlike. That is the way things are.

Ch. What evil thing, nurtured of earth,
[str. have you partaken of, my lady, what drug
drained from the salt sea's surge induced this madness
of death and sacrifice, sufficient to rout the people's curse?
You have cut yourself off from the city; an exile now, 1410
the citizens hate you mightily.

Cl. So you condemn me now to be an exile from the state,
pronouncing me the object of the city's hate and execration,
but in time past you brought no corresponding charge
against this man, who sacrificed his child, and thought no more

about her death than had she been one sheep from out
his shaggy multitude of flocks, and she - the best loved fruit
of my labour's pain - a spell to calm the winds from Thrace.
You did not think it right to drive this man from the land,
in payment for that stain of blood? But stern you are 1420
in judging me when you hear what I have done. I say to you:
"Yes, make your threats and be aware that I am well prepared
for you to rule, should you succeed in overpowering me,
but on these terms, that if the gods' decree is otherwise,
perhaps too late, you will come to learn to be discreet."

Ch. You are indeed ambitious
[ant. and your arrogance yelps out loud, as if
this sanguinary twist of fate had turned your head;
ensanguined too the gaze of your bloodshot eyes.
Now you must pay the price, bereft of friends,
pay back blow for blow. 1430

Cl. Hear then the rightness of the oaths that I will swear;
by the Justice that my daughter's soul demands,
by Ruin and the Furies, with the help of whom I cut
his throat, no expectation of dread attends this house
so long as Aegisthus' warmth glows in my hearth
and protects me well as it has done in the past.
For this man has been the ample shield of our defiance.
So here he lies, the man who took and used this girl,
yes, Agamemnon, charmer of the golden girls of Ilium;
and here his spear-bride lies, the prophetess 1440
and sharer of his bed, the speaker of signs
and trusted mistress, who also shared with him
the harshness of the rowers' bench. They have earned
this present privilege. For he lies so, while she,
swanlike, is nestled by his chest, and has sung
her last lament for death, a thought to bring
fresh relish to the pleasures of my bed.

Ch. Would that some painless Fate might swiftly come,
[str. a. no lingering thing,
might come to bring us everlasting,
endless sleep, since now our guardian 1450
is overcome, who cared for us
best and dared much, and that at the hands of a wife.
He lost his life at the hands of his wife.

[ephymn. a. Oh Helen, Helen, wayward you were,
one woman you caused such countless deaths,
souls lost beneath the walls of Troy,

	but now the final and flowering prize, bought through bloodshed indelible, and the strife you then caused in your house enforced death on this man.	1460
Cl.	You should not ask for a share in death, distressed by what has come to pass; nor should you turn your rage on Helen, claim she was a murderess, that she alone destroyed the lives of many men and caused the Greeks incurable grief.	
Ch. [ant. a.]	You, evil force, that tramples down the house and twin blood strains of Tantalus, the power you wield, from women sprung, like-minded women, it gnaws at my heart, like this crow, perched in malevolence above the corpse, that sings its tuneless grace.	1470
Cl.	Your talk is now directed down a proper path, since you invoke the deity that has afflicted all three generations of this race. From him bloodlust is nurtured in the gut; before the long past scar is healed, fresh pus.	1480
Ch. [str. b.]	Yes, great indeed is the god that you praise, the weight of whose rage presses down on the house, a terrible story of grief, of insatiate fate. But through Zeus, prime mover, is everything done! What action of men is done without Zeus? What of these things is not sanctioned by Zeus?	
[ephymn. b.]	My king, my king! How shall I weep for you? What can I say to match the love I feel? Prone in the web of this spider's net you breathed out your life in impious death, and I grieve for you, trapped in that fatal embrace, overcome by the wiles of a wife, by her hand on the double edged sword.	1490
Cl.	You then declare the guilt for this was mine? Do not condemn me, though, as being Agamemnon's wife!	

	Keen scented came the vengeance from the past and took the likeness of the dead man's wife, exactng retribution for the horrid feast of Atreus, a sacrifice in honour of the children dead.	1500
Ch. [ant. b.]	What man is there to testify that you are guiltless of this death? How, how? I pray that from his father's line there might arise an ally to avenge him. Black Ares indulges in force and the fresh flowing streams of kindred blood, advancing justice for the blood congealed of the cannibal feast.	1510
[ephymn. b.]	My king, my king! How shall I weep for you? What can I say to match the love I feel? Prone in the web of this spider's net you breathed out your life in impious death, and I grieve for you, trapped in that fatal embrace, overcome by the wiles of a wife, by her hand on the double edged sword.	1520
Cl.	I do not believe that this man's death was an ungenerous act. For did not this man too wreak death through guile upon the house? The seed he sowed in me that grew and bloomed, the child I wept for so, Iphigeneia, he treated as he has himself been dealt with - and let him not in Hades boast his reputation, since he has paid by the sword for the work he began.	
Ch. [str. c.]	I have no sense of where to turn! Bereft of wit my mind has no direction, now our house has failed. I dread the squall of blood that rains upon and shakes the house. And does the storm now ease to mist? Fate hones the blade of justice for another crime on yet another sharpening stone.	1531
[eph. c.]	I grieve for the land, the land, and wish that it had welcomed me before I looked upon this man, laid low in the bath with the silver walls. And who will bury him? Sing his lament?	1540

Will you then be so bold, who killed
 this man, your husband, as to sing his dirge,
 and render, in injustice, graceless gifts to him
 in monstrous payment for your crimes?
 And who by the tomb of this godlike man will labour to speak
 the words of tears and praise for him,
 with the spirit of truth in their heart. 1550

Cl. It is not right for you to talk about such care
 as this; he fell and died
 because of me and I shall bury him, but there
 will be no tears for him, shed by the people of this house,
 but Iphigeneia, his daughter, as is only right,
 may throw herself about her father's neck
 and greet him with a kiss,
 beside that stream of trouble and death that flows
 so swiftly through the underworld.

Ch. Charge counters counter charge,
 [ant. c.] hard fought the judgement. 1561
 Despoiler is despoiled, and the killer has paid in full.
 On the throne of Zeus the timeless legend waits,
 "Both agent and patient are one." That is the law.
 Who can hurl the congenital curse from the house?
 The race and its ruin are wedded as one.

Cl. The oracle about this man has issued now
 in truth. And I, therefore, am willing enough
 to make an oath, to the house's ancestral ghost,
 that I am patient now, although these things 1570
 were very hard to bear. As for the future, let
 that very spirit leave this house to grind in death
 and internecine strife the fortunes of some other race.
 A meagre part of our possessions will
 suffice me well, so long as I have swept
 away the madness from this house that showed
 itself in the murder of kin.

Aegisthus

The kindly light of this day's dawn brings justice in its train.
 Once more I now can say that the gods above, avengers of men,
 do gaze with care upon the troubles of this earth, since here I see 1580
 this man laid low, entangled in the mesh of the Furies' robes,
 I'm glad to say, in payment for his father's guileful crime.
 For when this man's father, Atreus, was ruler of this land,
 he exiled from the city and from his home his own brother, my
 father, Thyestes, in fact, to tell the story straight,
 who had been in former days his rival for the throne.

When, in sadness, Thyestes returned to be a suppliant of the hearth, he gained for himself this much safety at least - he was not killed nor did he stain with his own blood the floor of his father's home. But Atreus, the godless father of this man, he played for my father the role of zealous host, not that of friend, and set aside a day for him, apparently, for feasting and fellowship - and served him a stew of his own children's flesh. Feet, hands and heads, the extremities, in fact, he lopped them off and ground them down past recognition by the guests. And so my father took the food from him at once, in ignorance, and ate a meal that, as you see, has brought destruction on the race. And when it dawned on him, the sacrilege that had been done, he cried aloud and fell prostrate and vomited the victim flesh, cursed the house of Atreus implacably, and kicked the festive table from him as he cursed, to bring complete destruction on the race of Pleisthenes. So you see, these were the causes of this man's fall; and I it was that justly wove the pattern of this execution. For I, the third son born, was spared, and, a babe in arms and at the breast, was driven with my father from the land. Yet justice in her turn has brought me up and nurtured me, and so I have, despite that exile, laid my hands upon this man, by setting up this complex plot and subterfuge. A fine thing it would even be for me to die, now I have seen this man enmeshed in the toils of justice's net.

Ch. Aegisthus, I do not approve of arrogance in guilt. You willingly confess that you have killed this man, and by yourself contrived his piteous death? I say that on the judgement day your head will know no ease and that the people's curse will rain about your head as stones.

Ae. And do you, members of the lower deck and shackled to the oar, speak even so, while we are masters at the helm? You soon will know, old man, how harsh a task it is for one of such an advanced age to learn sobriety of speech. There are chains, and one may fast in them, and so old age, through hunger and prison both, and by their prophylactic pain, grows sensible. Foresight surely tells you this is how it is? You must not kick against the pricks in case you are impaled.

Ch. A woman, then, you laid your homicidal plans against the man who was our general, who but just now has led his army back, and stayed at home to stain and shame the master's bed.

Ae. These words will also be the source of bitter tears for you. Your tongue has not the charm of Orpheus by any means. For he did lead all creatures with the rapture of his song, while your childish jabberings annoy. You will be led away yourself. A little force will make you seem more docile.

Ch. So you will play the part of tyrant over Argos then,
although, despite the fact you plotted this man's fate,
you did not have the nerve to play the murderer yourself.

Ae. The woman's role was clearly in the staging of the deed,
while I had been a long term suspect and an enemy.
I will endeavour with the help of this man's wealth
to rule the citizens; I will constrain all opposition
with a heavy yoke: no, not for them the bridle and the oats 1640
a thoroughbred enjoys! The dungeon and its hungry, dark
unfriendliness will soon conspire to break them in.

Ch. But why not kill this gentleman yourself, if your mind
was set on crime? Why did the woman have to kill her man,
in partnership with you, to bring pollution on the land
and on the gods that dwell in it? And does Orestes live and see
somewhere this day's ill light and will he come back home,
his fortune fair, to be the dreadful nemesis of this twin scourge?

Ae. Since this is the way you speak and behave, be swiftly warned!
You there, friends and spearmen, here is work to hand for you! 1650

Ch. You there, let every man be well prepared with sword to hand!

Ae. I too have a sword in my hand and am not afraid to die!

Ch. Well said - your promise to die! We accept the good omen.

Cl. No, no, my dearest of men, this risk of harm is not for us.
Already the harvest of grief and suffering is rich indeed;
Pain there has been and enough - let us spill no more blood.
Go now to your homes, reverend elders of Argos, submitting to fate,
before you are killed; we must be content at what we have done,
and if an end can be found for these woes, let us happily take it,
who have long been ground down by the weight of god's heel. 1660
A mere woman's words, if any man deems them worthy to hear.

Ae. But what of their slanderous tongues that blossom in spite,
of the words they spew out as they challenge the god,
of their rashness and folly of mind in rejecting our rule?

Ch. It never was the Argive way to hold an evil man in high regard.

Ae. In the days that are yet to come I will pursue you still.

Ch. Not if the god guides Orestes back, restores him to his home.

Ae. I know myself that men in exile always feed on empty hopes.

Ch. Ah yes, grow fat and defecate on justice while you can!

Ae. Know well you shall repay me for this foolishness. 1670

Ch. Yes, strut and pose beside your hen, you bantam cockerel!

Cl. Do not dignify their empty insults with your attention any more.
The two of us shall guide the business of this house quite well.